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More Questions than Answers: A Systematic Mixed Studies Literature Review of the Psychological Impact of Undergoing Active Surveillance for Low-Risk Prostate Cancer.

Ruane-McAteer, E. Porter, S. O'Sullivan, J. Prue, G.

Background

Frequently men with prostate cancer are diagnosed with low risk disease. Active Surveillance (AS) allows these men to postpone or avoid the adverse side-effects associated with curative treatment until the disease progresses, although this uncertainty can create an additional emotional burden.

Aim

To determine the psychological impact of AS to inform future study in this area and to provide recommendations for clinical practice.

Methods

Relevant studies were identified through an electronic database search using specified keywords from inception to September 2015. As both quantitative and qualitative studies were included, the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool was used to assess methodological quality.

Results

Twenty-three papers were included (20 quantitative, 3 qualitative). Papers were generally of low methodological quality. AS patients appeared to report favourable psychological wellbeing, with only a small proportion reporting psychological dysfunction. Factors associated with increased anxiety and depression included: lack of a partner, impaired mental health and neurotic personality. Increased role of the physician influenced anxiety and uncertainty. Ability to manage intrusive thoughts appeared to reduce distress.

Conclusion

Due to inappropriately timed baseline measures, inappropriate or lack of comparison/control groups, and insufficient sample size, the conclusion that AS has minimal impact on

psychological wellbeing may not be a true reflection of the AS experience. Further research should seek to address these limitations, and practitioners should be aware that despite medical benefits of AS, patients of a certain demographic profile or life experiences may require additional support during their time on AS.